



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Wednesday 7 February 2018 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor M Patel (Chair) and Councillors Conneely, Hossain and Thomas

Also Present: Councillor McLennan

1. **Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

There were no apologies for absence.

2. **Declarations of interests**

There were no declarations of interest

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 October 2017 be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. **Matters arising (if any)**

There were no matters arising.

5. **Order of Business**

RESOLVED: that the order of business be amended as set out below.

6. **Fostering Quarterly Monitoring Report**

Onder Beter (Head of Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency) introduced the Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report for 1 October 2017 to 31 December 2017. Members' attention was drawn to details of recent changes to staffing arrangements which encompassed the realignment of the primary in-house fostering functions. This realignment meant that foster carers would be assessed and then supported post-approval by the same social worker, thereby providing greater continuity of relationships and in turn supporting greater placement stability. Members were then directed to the overview of placement activity. Onder Beter advised that there had been a slight increase in the Brent LAC population since the last reporting period. There had also been slight increases in the numbers of children placed with Brent Foster Carers and Independent Fostering Agency carers. Slight decreases had been recorded for the number of children placed in semi-independent placements. These trends reflected the slight decrease in the number of adolescents entering the care system. There was also fewer Unaccompanied

Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) in Brent's care. Commenting on recruitment activity, Onder Beter advised that recruitment targets had not been achieved in the current reporting period due to lower conversion rates from referrals to 'initial visits'. Additionally, a significant number of assessments had not progressed beyond Stage 1 of the assessment process over the last two quarters, largely due to applicants' personal circumstances.

In the subsequent discussion, Members questioned whether the realignment of services would result in greater stability for children in placement, queried what monitoring arrangements were in place and how LAC would be involved in these. A member questioned whether there were any particular issues which prevented the council from attracting foster carer applicants. Further queries were raised regarding how the success of different marketing methods were measured and whether the new Service Manager role had been filled.

In response, Onder Beter advised that part of the rationale for realigning services was to reduce the number of times a child was transferred between different teams. Under the new structure a child should only be transferred once – at the point of entering care – when a social worker would be assigned. Nigel Chapman (Operational Director of Integration and Improved Outcomes) advised that nearly 40 per cent of Brent's LAC had completed the Bright Spots 'Your Life, Your Care' survey in 2017. This survey measured the quality of LAC's care experience and their sense of well-being and would be carried out again later that year. It was hoped that the impact of the changes to service structure would be reflected in an improved perception of the service by Brent's LAC.

Discussing barriers for potential foster carers, Onder Beter advised that recruitment difficulties were both London-wide and nation-wide, with the availability of a spare bedroom a key issue. A National Fostering Stocktake report had just been published for response by the Government and it was agreed that a summary of this report would be brought to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children and Young People) highlighted that the report also discussed recruitment practice as well as the debate regarding the professionalisation of foster carers. Nigel Chapman advised that interviews for the Service Manager role were currently being conducted.

RESOLVED:

- i) that the Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes arrange for a Brent foster carer to attend a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee to share their experiences of fostering for Brent.
- ii) that the executive summary of the National Fostering Stocktake report, along with a covering report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People, be submitted to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

7. Update from Care In Action

The Chair welcomed representatives from Care In Action (CIA) and invited an update of CIA's activities since the previous meeting.

HM advised that a group of CIA members had met with Diana Schmidt (the Council's Development Lead Social Pedagogue) and had discussed the Practice Framework Tree model. HM provided a detailed explanation of this model and advised that it would be used to improve ways of working with children and families. HM further advised that the Brent Pledge had been reviewed at a recent CIA meeting and members had discussed a number of changes that should be made. These changes had been incorporated in the version of the Brent Pledge to be considered by the committee later in the meeting. CIA had also been involved in reviewing the Pathway Plan forms which had been considered overlong and boring in parts. A further draft copy would be considered by CIA and two members were working on art for the cover.

The committee further heard that the National Children's Bureau's (NCB's) report on measuring the wellbeing of children in care had now been published. The views of CIA had contributed to this report, alongside those of four other Children in Care Councils. The CIA had made it known to the NCB that they would like to be considered for further work with them in the future. It was highlighted that a number of recommendations were made in the report including that a national outcomes framework for children in care should be developed by the government.

HS explained that she had been part of an interview panel for a Head of Service role and was pleased to report that the person selected by the Panel had been appointed to the position. HS had also attended a training session for foster carers and had been able to share her experiences with foster carers. HS commented that this had been an interesting experience for both and she felt that it had been valuable for the foster carers.

JS stated that he had attended the penultimate rehearsal for the Voice in a Million Choir which would be performing at Wembley Arena on 14 and 15 March 2018. The concert was being held to raise awareness of fostering and adoption and tickets were now available to purchase.

ND spoke on the consultation that had been held with young people living in semi-independent provision. This consultation sought views on the provider and had been delivered to 128 young people. 23 young people had completed the survey. The results of this survey would be shared once available.

HS concluded the update by noting that the CIAs Christmas meal had been held at Nandos and had been attended by Gail Tolley. This had been a really enjoyable evening for all.

The Chair thanked the members of CIA for the comprehensive update provided.

RESOLVED: that the verbal update provided by representatives of Care In Action be noted.

8. **Brent's Pledge for Looked After Children**

Onder Beter (Head of Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency) introduced the report which set out the revised Pledge for Looked After Children. Brent's Pledge had first been published in 2010 and was later reviewed and relaunched in

2014. The Pledge had again been reviewed in Autumn 2017, in consultation with Care in Action (CIA) and Care Leavers in Action (CLIA). Over 20 Looked After Children and 13 care leavers had shared their views. Learning from the Bright Spots Survey, conducted in Brent in April 2017, had also been incorporated in the reviewed Pledge, alongside feedback from social work teams, housing colleagues, and local partnership representatives from health and schools. It was anticipated that Members, chief officers and partners would sign up to the Pledge to signify their shared commitment to it.

Onder Beter further advised that the reviewed Pledge would be relaunched at the Celebration of Achievement Event in spring 2018. The Participation Officer would support CIA members to present the Brent Pledge at foster carers support groups, staff forums and team meetings to raise awareness. Gail Tolley added that all new councillors would have to undertake mandatory corporate parenting and safeguarding training which would include the Pledge. Nigel Chapman highlighted that children and young people had requested a credit card size version of the Pledge to make it easier to carry with them and this was currently being developed.

In response to a query, HM (CIA representative) advised that the Pledge had previously been too long. The new version had amalgamated some of the points and reduced the length of the descriptions. The Chair noted the Pledges of other authorities had also been considered as part of the review.

Responding to a further query, Onder Beter confirmed that the Pathway Plan template had been revised to make it more accessible for young people.

RESOLVED: that the revised Brent Pledge for Looked After Children as attached at Appendix 1 be endorsed by the committee and recommended for adoption by the council.

9. **Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Local Offer for Care Leavers**

Onder Beter (Head of Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency) introduced the report on the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The committee heard that the Act broadened the principles of corporate parenting for local authorities and required all local authorities to publish their Local Offer to care leavers by April 2018. The council had completed a lot of work in advance of this deadline and had consulted with a wide range of stakeholders, including Care Leavers in Action. The draft Local Offer to Care Leavers, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, was presented to the committee for consideration in advance of its submission to Cabinet on 12 February 2018 for approval.

A member questioned whether, rather than making care leavers exempt from paying council tax, it would be better for them to be supported to manage their money to cope with such expenses. Onder Beter advised that the number of care leavers who would be liable to pay council tax was relatively small and that Personal Advisers worked with care leavers to build money/budget management skills. However, underlying the proposal to exempt care leavers from paying council tax was the desire to show support for those young people as a corporate parent. Representatives from Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action advised that many care leavers lacked the familial support network that other young people might rely

upon if financial difficulties arose. Furthermore, care leavers did not have the same level of choice that many other young people had about when to leave home. The committee, accepting these points, highlighted the importance of supporting care leavers in this transitional phase.

Members further queried the council's commitments regarding mental health provision for care leavers. Onder Beter advised the council was making amendments to how care leavers were supported, particularly during the transition from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to adult mental health services. Work was underway with social workers to ensure that care leavers' needs in this respect were better identified and supported. A meeting had been scheduled with the provider of CAMHS tier 3 services to further discuss support for LAC and care leavers. Nigel Chapman (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes) advised that the thresholds for accessing adult mental health services were higher than CAMHS and therefore transitional support was required. This work was being pursued in partnership with Brent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). Members commented that there should be a referral pathway prioritising care leavers as a vulnerable group. Representatives for Care Leavers in Action advised that the increased difficulty experienced by care leavers in trying to access adult mental health services could leave young people feeling uncared for. Furthermore, the increased difficulty of access came at a time when many young people were in a better position than their younger selves to be able to address and reflect on issues that had affected them. It was subsequently agreed to invite the Assistant Director, Brent CCG to a future meeting of the committee to discuss this issue further.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the report regarding the Children and Social Work Act 2017 – The 'Local Offer' for Care Leavers, from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People be noted.
- ii) That the Corporate Parenting Committee support the work of the department in ensuring partner agencies commit to providing an offer to care leavers that would be included in the final version of the Local Offer document.
- iii) That the Assistant Director, Brent CCG be invited to a future meeting of the committee to discuss care leavers' access to mental health services;

That Cabinet be recommended to:

- iv) approve the draft Local Offer to Care Leavers as set out in Appendix 1 of the report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People;
- v) delegate authority to the Strategic Director, Children and Young People, to make any necessary revisions to the Local Offer and re-consult if required following publication of statutory guidance;
- vi) approve the Brent Care Leavers Charter as set out at Appendix 2 of the report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People;

- vii) agree that as part of the Local Offer to Care Leavers who are looked after by Brent:
 - a. that the Council use its powers as a billing authority to reduce to nil council tax payable by care leavers who live in the borough;
 - b. that in cases where care leavers live outside the borough and are liable to pay council tax, the Council provide financial support to reimburse that cost;

- viii) delegate authority to the Strategic Director of Resources and the Strategic Director, Children and Young People to take all appropriate steps to set up, implement and administer all the areas of support as set out in the Local Offer.

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 6.15 pm

M Patel
Chair